

Bridging the River

Story by PV2 Benjamin M. Hokkanen

THE road leads to 300 meters of swirling, muddy water, and you have only two hours to get all your equipment across. Who do you call?

Well, the 652nd Engineer Company, from Ellsworth, Wis., for one.

During its last bridge-building exercise, at Fort Chaffee, Ark., the 652nd worked with four other Army Reserve companies and a National Guard engineer company to bridge the Arkansas River in half the two-hour time allotted.

The other units participating in the exercise were the 299th Engr. Co. from Fort Belvoir, Va.; 459th Engr. Co. from Clarksburg, W. Va.; 739th Engr. Co. from Granite City Ill.; 814th Engr. Co. from Fort Polk, La.; and the Missouri National Guard's 1438th Engr. Co.

Today, much of the Army's critical

support capabilities are provided by the reserve component, especially the Army Reserve. This exercise provided an opportunity to build engineer-support skills while strengthening the capabilities of the reserve-component team.

Under the command of CPT Glen D. Johnson, 73 members of the 652nd used 19 railcars of equipment — including bridge bays, bridge erection boats and 22 Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Trucks — to "Bridge the Gap," as their slogan goes.

All this equipment and more was needed to cross the river, as it took nearly 42 bays to complete the span, said 1SG Barry J. Foy.

"The 652nd was in charge of sling-load operations," said Johnson. "We

had to load bays into slings attached to helicopters, unload the bays at the site, and then float the bays down river and attach them to other bays."

With the pieces ready and in place, all that was left was for soldiers to connect the bays.

"The soldiers performed well above my expectations," said Johnson. "Everything went flawlessly. We worked out all the bugs on our practice run, so everything went smoothly on the final exercise."

The preparation was intense. On a typical day, the units started at 5 a.m. and worked past 10 p.m., sometimes continuing as late as 3 a.m., said the 652nd's SGT Bob Denn.

"I think that we did so well because we're such a tight-knit group," Denn said. "It isn't just your commander telling you 'You guys are really good.' We look at the quality of work we do and are able to say, 'We are good.' We're exceeding the standard. That's something to be proud of." □



PVT Tony Lindbach

Soldiers of the Army Reserve's 652nd Engineer Company move a bridge-erection boat into position during the exercise at Fort Chaffee.



SPC Cory Meyman

Bridge-erection boats hold the bridge in place against the river's current. Four Reserve companies and a company from the National Guard took part in the exercise.